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AUTHOR	Grubb, W. Norton; Worthen, Helena; Byrd, Barbara; Webb, Elnora; Badway, Norena; Case, Chester; Goto, Stanford; Villeneuve, Jennifer Curry
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study of community college faculty, based on classroom observation and interviews of 257 instructors and 60 administrators at 32 community colleges across the country, was undertaken to explore what "teaching looks like in a teaching college." The researchers were especially interested in the collective nature of teaching: the influence of peer networks, and the culture and incentives that exist within the colleges. The authors conclude that there is a "great divide" in community colleges, which advertise themselves as teaching institutions, but do little to improve the quality of instruction. Two overall findings about the lives of teachers are presented: instructors are overloaded, often teaching 5 classes at a time and having to grade papers and quizzes for 150 students; and they are isolated, partly out of respect for academic freedom, partly out of the proliferation of part-time faculty and lecturers, and partly because of the lack of activities to draw them together around teaching. Opportunities for learning communities and collaborative teaching are found to be rare, and staff development activities are formulaic, contrived, and often not focused on teaching. Myriad examples are provided, often in the instructor's words, of both good and bad teaching practices. Recommendations are made for improving the teaching culture of the community colleges, including revised personnel practices, greater administrative commitment to teaching, and the development of in-service education and staff development. (CAK)

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